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Compliments of Chauncey M. Depew

ORATION

BY

HON. CHAUNCEY M. DEPEW

AT THE UNVEILING OF

THE BARTHOLDI STATUE OF LIBERTY ENLIGHTENING THE WORLD.

OCTOBER 28, 1886.

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WE dedicate this statue to the friendship of nations and the peace of the world.

The spirit of liberty embraces all races in common brotherhood; it voices in all languages the same needs and aspirations. The full power of its expansive and progressive influence cannot be reached until wars cease, armies are disbanded, and international disputes are settled by lawful tribunals and the principles of justice. Then the people of every nation, secure from invasion and

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free from the burden and menace of great armaments, can calmly and dispassionately promote their own happiness and prosperity. The marvelous development and progress of this republic is due to the fact that in rigidly adhering to the advice of Washington for absolute neutrality and non-interference in the politics and policies of other governments we have avoided the necessity of depleting our industries to feed our armies, of taxing and impoverishing our resources to carry on war, and of limiting our liberties to concentrate power in our government. Our great civil strife, with all its expenditure of blood and treasure, was a terrible sacrifice for freedom. The results are so immeasurably great that by comparison the cost is insignificant. The development of liberty was impossible while she was shackled to the slave. The divine thought which intrusted to the conquered the full measure of home rule and accorded to them an equal share of

imperial power was the inspiration of God. With sublime trust it left to liberty the elevation of the freedmen to political rights and the conversion of the rebel to patriotic citizenship.

The rays from this torch illuminate a century of unbroken friendship between France and the United States. Peace and its opportunities for material progress and the expansion of popular liberties send from here a fruitful and noble lesson to all the world. It will teach the peoples of all countries that in curbing the ambitions and dynastic purposes of princes and privileged classes, and in cultivating the brotherhood of man, lies the true road to their enfranchisement. The friendship of individuals, their unselfish devotion to each other, their willingness to die in each other's stead, are the most tender and touching of human records; they are the inspiration of youth and the solace of age; but nothing human is so

beautiful and sublime as two great peoples of alien race and language transmitting down the ages a love begotten in gratitude, and strengthening as they increase in power and assimilate in their institutions and liberties.

The French alliance which enabled us to win our independence is the romance of history. It overcame improbabilities impossible in fiction, and its results surpass the dreams of imagination. The most despotic of kings, surrounded by the most exclusive of feudal aristocracies, sending fleets and armies officered by the scions of the proudest of nobilities to fight for subjects in revolt and the liberties of the common people, is a paradox beyond the power of mere human energy to have wrought or solved. The march of this mediæval chivalry across our States, respecting persons and property as soldiers never had before, never taking an apple or touching a fence rail without per-

mission and payment, treating the ragged Continentals as if they were knights in armor and of noble ancestry, captivating our grandmothers by their courtesy and our grandfathers by their courage, remains unequaled in the poetry of war. It is the most magnificent tribute in history to the volcanic force of ideas and the dynamitic power of truth, though the crust of the globe imprison them. In the same ignorance and fearlessness with which a savage plays about a powder magazine with a torch, the Bourbon king and his court, buttressed by the consent of centuries and the unquestioned possession of every power of the state, sought relief from cloying pleasures and vigor for enervated minds, in permitting and encouraging the loftiest genius and the most impassioned eloquence of the time to discuss the rights and liberties of man. With the orator the themes were theories which fired only his imagination, and with

the courtiers they were pastimes or jests. Neither speakers nor listeners saw any application of these ennobling sentiments to the common mass and groveling herd, whose industries they squandered in riot and debauch and whose bodies they hurled against battlement and battery to gratify ambition or caprice. But these revelations illuminated many an ingenuous soul among the young aristocracy, and with distorted rays penetrated the Cimmerian darkness which enveloped the people. They bore fruit in the heart and mind of one youth to whom America owes much and France everything, the Marquis de Lafayette.

As the centuries roll by and in the fullness of time the rays of liberty's torch are the beacon lights of the world, the central niches in the earth's Pantheon of Freedom will be filled by the figures of Washington and Lafayette. The story of this young French noble's life is the history of the time which

made possible this statue, and his spirit is the very soul of this celebration. He was the heir of one of the most ancient and noble families of France, he had inherited a fortune which made him one of the richest men in his country, and he had enlarged and strengthened his aristocratic position by marriage, at the early age of sixteen, with a daughter of the ducal house of Noailles. Before him were pleasure and promotion at court and the most brilliant opportunities in the army, the state, and the diplomatic service. He was a young officer of nineteen, stationed at Metz, when he met at the table of his commander the Duke of Gloucester, the brother of George the Third. The Duke brought news of an insurrection which had broken out in the American colonies, and read, to the amazement of his hearers, the strange dogmas and fantastic theories which these "insurgents," as he called them, had put forth in what they

styled their Declaration of Independence. That document put in practice the theories which Jefferson had studied with the French philosophers. It fired at once the train which they had laid in the mind of this young nobleman of France. Henceforth his life was dedicated to "Liberty Enlightening the World." The American Commissioners at Paris tried to dissuade this volunteer by telling him that their credit was gone, that they could not furnish him transportation, and handing him the dispatches announcing the reverses which had befallen Washington, the retreat of his disheartened and broken army across New Jersey, the almost hopeless condition of their cause. But he replied in these memorable words: "Thus far you have seen my zeal only; now it shall be something more. I will purchase and equip a vessel myself. It is while danger presses that I wish to join your fortunes." The King prohibits his sailing, he

eludes the guards sent for his arrest, his family interpose every obstacle, and only his heroic young wife shares his enthusiasm and seconds his resolution to give his life and fortune to liberty. When on the ocean battling with the captain who fears to take him to America, and pursued by British cruisers specially instructed for his capture, he writes to her this loving and pathetic letter: "I hope for my sake you will become a good American. This is a sentiment proper for virtuous hearts. Intimately allied to the happiness of the whole human family is that of America, destined to become the respectable and sure asylum of virtue, honesty, toleration, equality, and of tranquil liberty." Except the Mayflower, no ship ever sailed across the ocean from the Old World to the New carrying passengers of such moment to the future of mankind.

It is idle now to speculate whether our fathers could have succeeded without the

French alliance. The struggle would undoubtedly have been infinitely prolonged and probably compromised. But the alliance assured our triumph, and Lafayette secured the alliance. The fabled argosies of ancient and the armadas and fleets of modern times were commonplace voyages compared with the mission enshrined in this inspired boy. He stood before the Continental Congress and said, "I wish to serve you as a volunteer and without pay," and at twenty took his place with Gates and Green and Lincoln as a Major-General in the Continental Army. As a member of Washington's military family, sharing with that incomparable man his board and bed and blanket, Lafayette won his first and greatest distinction in receiving from the American chief a friendship which was closer than that bestowed upon any other of his compatriots, and which ended only in death. The great commander saw in the reckless daring with which he

carried his wound to rally the flying troops at Brandywine, the steady nerve with which he held the column wavering under a faithless general at Monmouth, the wisdom and caution with which he maneuvered inferior forces in the face of the enemy, his willingness to share every privation of the illy clad and starving soldiery, and to pledge his fortune and credit to relieve their privations, a commander upon whom he could rely, a patriot he could trust, a man he could love.

The surrender of Burgoyne at Saratoga was the first decisive event of the war. It defeated the British plan to divide the country by a chain of forts up the Hudson and conquer it in detail. It inspired hope at home and confidence abroad. It seconded the passionate appeals of Lafayette and the marvelous diplomacy of Benjamin Franklin, it overcame the prudent counsels of Necker, warning the King against this experiment, and won the Treaty of Alliance between the

old Monarchy and the young Republic. Lafayette now saw that his mission was in France. He said, "I can help the cause more at home than here," and asked for leave of absence. Congress voted him a sword and presented it with a resolution of gratitude, and he returned bearing this letter from that convention of patriots to his King; "We recommend this young nobleman to your Majesty's notice as one whom we know to be wise in council, gallant in the field, and patient under the hardships of war." It was a certificate which Marlborough might have coveted, and Gustavus might have worn as the proudest of his decorations. But, though King and Court vied with each other in doing him honor, though he was welcomed as no Frenchman had ever been by triumphal processions in cities and fêtes in villages, by addresses and popular applause, he reckoned them of value only in the power they gave him to procure aid for Liberty's fight in

America. "France is now committed to war," he argued, "and her enemy's weak point for attack is in America. Send there your money and men." And he returned with the army of Rochambeau and the fleet of De Grasse.

"It is fortunate," said De Maurepas, the Prime Minister, "that Lafayette did not want to strip Versailles of its furniture for his dear Americans, for nobody could withstand his ardor." None too soon did this assistance arrive, for Washington's letter to the American Commissioners in Paris passed it on the way, in which he made this urgent appeal: "If France delays a timely and powerful aid in the critical posture of our affairs, it will avail us nothing should she attempt it hereafter. We are at this hour suspended in the balance. In a word, we are at the end of our tether, and now or never deliverance must come." General Washington saw in the allied forces now at

his disposal that the triumph of independence was assured. The long dark night of doubt and despair was illuminated by the dawn of a hope. The material was at hand to carry out the comprehensive plans so long matured, so long deferred, so patiently kept. That majestic dignity which had never bent to adversity, that lofty and awe-inspiring reserve which presented an impenetrable barrier to familiarity, either in council or at the festive board, so dissolved in the welcome of these decisive visitors that the delighted French and the astounded American soldiers saw Washington for the first and only time in his life express his happiness with all the joyous effervescence of hilarious youth.

The flower of the young aristocracy of France in their brilliant uniforms, and the farmers and frontiersmen of America in their faded continentals, bound by a common baptism of blood became brothers in the

knighthood of Liberty. With emulous eagerness to be first in at the death, while they shared the glory, they stormed the redoubts at Yorktown and compelled the surrender of Cornwallis and his army. While this practically ended the war, it strengthened the alliance and cemented the friendship between the two great peoples. The mutual confidence and chivalric courtesy which characterized their relations has no like example in international comity. When an officer from General Carlton, the British Commander-in-Chief, came to headquarters with an offer of peace and independence, if the Americans would renounce the French Alliance, Washington refused to receive him; Congress spurned Carlton's secretary bearing a like message; and the States, led by Maryland, denounced all who entertained propositions of peace which were not approved by France as public enemies. And peace with independence meant prosperity and happiness to

a people in the very depths of poverty and despair. France, on the other hand, though sorely pressed for money, said in the romantic spirit which permeated this wonderful union: "Of the 27,000,000 livres we have loaned you, we forgive you 9,000,000 as a gift of friendship, and when with years there comes prosperity you can pay the balance without interest."

With the fall of Yorktown Lafayette felt that he could do more for peace and independence in the diplomacy of Europe than in the war in America. His arrival in France shook the Continent. Though one of the most practical and self-poised of men, his romantic career in the New World had captivated courts and peoples. In the formidable league which he had quickly formed with Spain and France, England saw humiliation and defeat, and made a treaty of peace by which she recognized the independence of the Republic of the United States.

In this treaty were laid the deep, broad, and indestructible foundations for the great statue we this day dedicate. It left to the American people the working out of the problem of self-government. Without king to rule or class to follow, they were to try the experiment of building a nation upon the sovereignty of the individual and the equality of all men before the law. Their only guide, and trust, and hope were God and Liberty. In the fraternal greetings of this hour sixty millions of witnesses bear testimony to their wisdom, and the foremost and freest Government in the world is their monument.

The fight for liberty in America was won. Its future here was threatened with but one danger, the slavery of the negro. The soul of Lafayette, purified by battle and suffering, saw the inconsistency and the peril, and he returned to this country to plead with State Legislatures and with Congress for the liberation of what he termed "my brethren,

the blacks." But now the hundred years' war for liberty in France was to begin.

America was its inspiration, Lafayette its apostle, and the returning French army its emissaries. Beneath the trees by day and in the halls at night, at Mt. Vernon, Lafayette gathered from Washington the gospel of freedom. It was to sustain and guide him in after years against the temptations of power and the despair of the dungeon. He carried the lessons and the grand example through all the trials and tribulations of his desperate struggle and partial victory for the enfranchisement of his country. From the ship, on departing, he wrote to his great chief, whom he was never to see again, this touching good-bye: "You are the most beloved of all the friends I ever had or shall have anywhere. I regret that I cannot have the inexpressible pleasure of embracing you in my own house and welcoming you in a family where your name is adored. Every-

thing that admiration, respect, gratitude, friendship, and filial love can inspire is combined in my affectionate heart to devote me most tenderly to you. In your friendship I find a delight which no words can express." His farewell to Congress was a trumpet-blast which resounded round a world then bound in the chains of despotism and caste. Every Government on the Continent was an absolute monarchy, and no language can describe the poverty and wretchedness of the people. Taxes levied without law exhausted their property; they were arrested without warrant and rotted in the Bastile without trial, and they were shot at as game and tortured without redress, at the caprice or pleasure of their feudal lords. Into court and camp this message came like the handwriting on the wall at Belshazzar's feast. Hear his words: "May this immense temple of freedom ever stand a lesson to oppressors, an example to the oppressed, a sanctuary for

the rights of mankind; and may these happy United States attain that complete splendor and prosperity which will illustrate the blessings of their government, and for ages to come rejoice the departed souls of its founders." Well might Louis the Sixteenth, more far-sighted than his Ministers, exclaim: "After fourteen hundred years of power the old Monarchy is doomed."

While the principles of the American Revolution were fermenting in France, Lafayette, the hero and favorite of the hour, was an honored guest at royal tables and royal camps. The proud Spaniard and the Great Frederic of Germany alike welcomed him, and everywhere he announced his faith in government founded on the American idea. The financial crisis in the affairs of King Louis on the one hand, and the rising tide of popular passion on the other, compelled the summons of the Assembly of Notables at Versailles. All the great officers of

state, the aristocracy, the titled clergy, the royal princes were there, but no representative of the people. Lafayette spoke for them, and, fearless of the effort of the brother of the King to put him down, he demanded religious toleration, equal taxes, just and equal administration of the laws, and the reduction of royal expenditures to fixed and reasonable limits. This overturned the whole feudal fabric which had been in course of construction for a thousand years. To make effectual and permanent this tremendous stride toward the American experiment, he paralyzed the Court and Cabinet by the call for a National Assembly, an Assembly of the people. Through that Assembly he carried a Declaration of Rights, founded upon the natural liberties of man, a concession of popular privilege never before secured in the modern history of Europe; and going as far as he believed the times would admit toward his idea of an American

Republic, he builded upon the ruins of absolutism a constitutional Monarchy.

But French democracy had not been trained and educated in the schools of the Puritan or the Colonist. Ages of tyranny, of suppression, repression, and torture had developed the tiger and dwarfed the man. Democracy had not learned the first rudiments of liberty, self-restraint, and self-government. It beheaded King and Queen, it drenched the land with the blood of the noblest and best; in its indiscriminate frenzy and madness it spared neither age nor sex, virtue nor merit, and drove its benefactor, because he denounced its excesses and tried to stem them, into exile and the dungeon of Olmutz. Thus ended in the horrors of the French Revolution Lafayette's first fight for liberty at home. After five years of untold sufferings, spurning release at the price of his allegiance to monarchy, holding with sublime faith, amidst the most disheartening

and discouraging surroundings, to the principles of freedom for all, he was released by the sword of Napoleon Bonaparte, to find that the untamed ferocity of the Revolution had been trained to the service of the most brilliant, captivating, and resistless of military despotisms by the mighty genius of the great Dictator. He, only, was neither dazzled nor dismayed, and when he had rejected every offer of recognition and honor, Napoleon said: "Lafayette alone in France holds fast to his original ideas of liberty. Though tranquil now he will reappear if occasion offers." Against the First Consulate of Bonaparte he voted "No, unless with guarantees of freedom." When Europe lay helpless at the feet of the conqueror, and in the frenzy of military glory France neither saw nor felt the chains he was forging upon her, Lafayette from his retirement of Lagrange pleaded with the Emperor for Republican principles, holding up to him the retributions

always meted out to tyrants, and the pure undying fame of the immortal few who patriotically decide, when upon them alone rests the awful verdict, whether they shall be the enslavers or the saviors of their country.

The sun of Austerlitz set in blood at Waterloo, the swords of allied Kings placed the Bourbon once more on the throne of France. In the popular tempest of July, the nation rose against the intolerable tyranny of the King, and, calling upon this unfaltering friend of liberty, said with one voice, "You alone can save France from despotism on the one hand, and the orgies of the Jacobin mob on the other; take absolute power, be marshal, general, dictator if you will." But, in assuming command of the National Guard, the old soldier and patriot answered, amidst the hail of shot and shell: "Liberty shall triumph, or we all perish together." He dethroned and drove out Charles X., and France, contented with any destiny he might

accord to her, with unquestioning faith, left her future in his hands. He knew that the French people were not yet ready to take and faithfully keep American liberty. He believed that in the school of constitutional government they would rapidly learn, and in the fullness of time adopt, its principles, and he gave them a King who was the popular choice, and surrounded him with the restraints of charter and an Assembly of the people. And now this friend of mankind, expressing with his last breath a fervent prayer that his beloved France might speedily enjoy the liberty and equality and the Republican institutions of his adored America, entered peacefully into rest. United in a common sorrow and a common sentiment, the people of France and the people of the United States watered his grave with their tears and wafted his soul to God with their gratitude.

To-day in the gift by the one, and the acceptance by the other, of this colossal

statue, the people of the two countries celebrate their unity in Republican institutions, in governments founded upon the American idea, and in their devotion to liberty. Together they rejoice that its spirit has penetrated all lands and is the hopeful future of all peoples. American liberty has been for a century a beacon light for the nations. Under its teachings and by the force of its example, the Italians have expelled their petty and arbitrary princelings and united under a Parliamentary government; the gloomy despotism of Spain has been dispelled by the representatives of the people and a free press; the great German race have demonstrated their power for empire and their ability to govern themselves. The Austrian monarch, who, when a hundred years ago Washington pleaded with him across the seas for the release of Lafayette from the dungeon of Olmutz, replied that "he had not the power," because the safety of his

throne and his pledges to his royal brethren of Europe compelled him to keep confined the one man who represented the enfranchisement of the people of every race and country, is to-day, in the person of his successor, rejoicing with his subjects in the limitations of a constitution which guarantees liberties, and a Congress which protects and enlarges them. Magna Charta, won at Runnymede for Englishmen, and developing into the principles of the Declaration of Independence with their descendants, has returned to the mother country to bear fruit in an open Parliament, a free press, the loss of royal prerogative, and the passage of power from the classes to the masses.

The sentiment is sublime which moves the people of France and America, the blood of whose fathers, commingling upon the battle-fields of the Revolution, made possible this magnificent march of liberty and their own Republics, to commemorate the results of

the past and typify the hopes of the future in this noble work of art. The descendants of Lafayette, Rochambeau, and De Grasse, who fought for us in our first struggle, and Laboulaye, Henri Martin, De Lesseps, and other grand and brilliant men, whose eloquent voices and powerful sympathies were with us in our last, conceived the idea, and it has received majestic form and expression through the genius of Bartholdi.

In all ages the achievements of man and his aspirations have been represented in symbols. Races have disappeared and no record remains of their rise or fall, but by their monuments we know their history. The huge monoliths of the Assyrians and the obelisks of the Egyptians tell their stories of forgotten civilizations, but the sole purpose of their erection was to glorify rulers and preserve the boasts of conquerors. They teach sad lessons of the vanity of ambition, the cruelty of arbitrary power, and the

miseries of mankind. The Olympian Jupiter enthroned in the Parthenon expressed in ivory and gold the awful majesty of the Greek idea of the King of the gods; the bronze statue of Minerva on the Acropolis offered the protection of the patron Goddess of Athens to the mariners who steered their ships by her helmet and spear; and in the Colossus of Rhodes, famed as one of the wonders of the world, the Lord of the Sun welcomed the commerce of the East to the city of his worship. But they were all dwarfs in size and pigmies in spirit beside this mighty structure and its inspiring thought. Higher than the monument in Trafalgar Square, which commemorates the victories of Nelson on the sea; higher than the Column Vendome, which perpetuates the triumphs of Napoleon on the land; higher than the towers of the Brooklyn Bridge, which exhibit the latest and grandest results of science, invention, and industrial progress,

this Statue of Liberty rises toward the heavens to illustrate an idea which nerved the three hundred at Thermopylæ and armed the ten thousand at Marathon; which drove Tarquin from Rome and aimed the arrow of Tell; which charged with Cromwell and his Ironsides and accompanied Sidney to the block; which fired the farmer's gun at Lexington and razed the Bastile in Paris; which inspired the charter in the cabin of the Mayflower and the Declaration of Independence from the Continental Congress.

It means that with the abolition of privileges to the few and the enfranchisement of the individual, the equality of all men before the law, and universal suffrage, the ballot secure from fraud and the voter from intimidation, the press free and education furnished by the State for all, liberty of worship and free speech; the right to rise, and equal opportunity for honor and fortune, the problems of labor and capital, of social regeneration

and moral growth, of property and poverty, will work themselves out under the benign influences of enlightened law-making and law-abiding liberty, without the aid of kings and armies, or of anarchists and bombs.

Through the Obelisk, so strangely recalling to us of yesterday the past of twenty centuries, a forgotten monarch says, "I am the Great King, the Conqueror, the Chastiser of Nations," and except as a monument of antiquity it conveys no meaning and touches no chord of human sympathy. But, for unnumbered centuries to come, as Liberty levels up the people to higher standards and a broader life, this statue will grow in the admiration and affections of mankind. When Franklin drew the lightning from the clouds, he little dreamed that in the evolution of science his discovery would illuminate the torch of Liberty for France and America. The rays from this beacon, lighting this gateway to the continent, will welcome the

poor and the persecuted with the hope and promise of homes and citizenship. It will teach them that there is room and brotherhood for all who will support our institutions and aid in our development; but that those who come to disturb our peace and dethrone our laws are aliens and enemies forever. I devoutly believe that from the unseen and the unknown, two great souls have come to participate in this celebration. The faith in which they died fulfilled, the cause for which they battled triumphant, the people they loved in the full enjoyment of the rights for which they labored and fought and suffered, the spirit voices of Washington and Lafayette join in the glad acclaim of France and the United States to Liberty Enlightening the World.


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